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ABSTRACT

This document outlines the factors necessary in creating a faculty handbook for distance learning programs. It begins by discussing the various uses for this kind of faculty handbook, such as clarifying faculty responsibilities, defining policies and procedures of distance learning, and serving as a reference and marketing tool. It then describes the preparatory work involved in writing the handbook, and suggests using handbooks from other institutions as guidelines. Next, it details handbook contents, which should include an institutional mission statement, a student profile, support services, faculty responsibilities, policies and procedures, contact numbers, and the distance learning syllabus. The next section defines faculty responsibilities: understanding course materials, developing a syllabus, scheduling on-campus meetings, communicating regularly with students and the distance learning office, testing procedure development, and keeping records. Support staff responsibilities may include marketing distance learning courses, distributing syllabi and course materials, and providing technical services and course evaluations. Finally, the handbook should list general policies and procedures, such as faculty assignments, class sizes, and distance learning delivery methods. (YKH)

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Collaboration & Cooperation: Using Faculty Handbooks to Define Faculty and Staff Responsibilities in Distance Learning Programs

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COLLABORATION & COOPERATION:
Using Faculty Handbooks to Define Faculty & Staff Responsibilities in Distance Learning Programs

by

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Uses for Faculty Handbook

In addition to being a reference tool, a distance learning faculty handbook can also be used to clarify the role and responsibilities of the faculty member, define the policies and procedures of the distance learning office and how they effect the job of the faculty member. When an instructor has a question, the faculty handbook should provide practical answers for solving the problem and even who is responsible for a particular situation.

Your faculty handbook may also be a marketing and public relations tool, which both answers questions for faculty considering teaching via distance learning and also motivates them to give it a try. Don't overlook the requirements of your regional accrediting organization for another use for your faculty handbook. In many cases accrediting bodies are now requiring special faculty training for teaching distance learning classes, and your handbook could become an integral part of the materials documenting this training to the accrediting agency.

Getting Prepared

Before you sit down to start writing your distance learning faculty handbook, gather the documents and reference materials you want to adapt for inclusion in your handbook. Include your institution's vision and mission statements, explaining briefly how distance education supports this philosophy - try to that present distance learning as an integral part of your institution and not an "add-on" program.

Review the handbook provided to on-campus faculty and your college catalog for important information. Remember to adapt policies which may have been written with more traditional instructional settings in

mind. For example, if your college catalog has an attendance requirement in any of its policies, your handbook should clearly state if/how these policies are to be applied to distance learners.

Select 2 or 3 well-written distance learning course outlines developed by your most experienced and successful distance learning faculty, and include their techniques, tips and procedures. Also have distance learning brochures, schedules, forms, surveys, accreditation publications and research data on hand for ideas and reference.

Ask faculty and staff for issues that need particular emphasis or explanation. Is there anything your staff has had to explain 19 times to 19 different faculty? Your handbook is your opportunity to say it just once in writing. Finally, don't reinvent the wheel! Distance learning faculty handbooks from other institutions are a goldmine of information, and you'll find your colleagues are usually willing to share copies of their handbooks.

Handbook Contents

Do you have all your reference materials gathered? Then it's time to decide the contents of the handbook. Start with a welcome letter and your institution's philosophy and mission statement, and the description of how distance learning fits in. Next, include a student profile so that faculty better understand the students most likely to enroll in distance learning courses. List all the learning resources and support services available to the distance learner, and include a detailed explanation on faculty responsibility, with particular emphasis on the distance learning syllabus.

Outline the services provided by the distance learning staff to faculty and students. General policies and procedures as well as a list of important phone, fax and TDD numbers, e-mail and WWW addresses are helpful to include for the faculty member's convenience. Don't forget to include contact numbers for the bookstore, library and records office. At the end of your faculty handbook attach sample forms that faculty will normally use, for example, room reservation forms or bookstore order forms. Since distance learning programs vary, there may be other items you need to include in your distance learning faculty handbook.

Faculty Responsibilities

First of all, distance learning faculty need to be familiar with all the course materials, including video lessons, textbook, study guide, faculty manual, test bank, and any other related materials. To make the viewing of 12 - 13 hours of video less daunting, consider loaning faculty a set of VHS tapes for home use.

Another important faculty responsibility is the design and development of the distance learning course syllabus. Provide a list of topics to be covered in the syllabus, and suggest procedural and instructional strategies. Emphasize the need for the syllabus to be clear, concise and complete. If a faculty member forgets to include something in an on-campus course syllabus, it is fairly simple to tell all the students at the next class meeting. The same omission in a distance learning syllabus would require the faculty to mail/call scores of individual distance learners! Time spent in developing a thorough syllabus is time well spent.

Faculty may be required to schedule and conduct on-campus meetings for orientations and test sessions, so encourage them to review the distance learner profile before scheduling these meetings. Evenings and/or weekends may be the best time for any on-campus meetings.

Since research has shown that regular interaction with faculty promotes student success and course completion, stress the need for distance learning faculty to communicate regularly with their students. Faculty should be available via phone, U.S. mail, fax and (hopefully) e-mail. Be frank in describing the volume of telephone calls faculty may receive, and emphasis the need to return calls promptly. If faculty do not have access to voice-mail or answering machines, make sure that they list a phone number in the syllabus where a message may be left and that they check for messages regularly. Encourage faculty to be patient, active listeners. Sometimes a show of concern from an instructor is all it takes to motivate a distance learner.

Clearly delineate responsibilities for the administration and grading of student tests. Assure your faculty that they still have control over the type of examinations and the course content to be tested, and explain any testing assistance available through the distance learning office or testing centers. Your distance handbook is an opportunity to explain testing policies and procedures

And while paperwork is never fun, faculty need to recognize that paperwork and recordkeeping are also essential to the smooth operation of a distance learning class.

In addition to communicating regularly with students, faculty members also need to stay in touch with the distance learning office - especially when they make any changes to their syllabi during the semester - since students often call the distance learning office with questions about the syllabus. Finally faculty need to get very involved in promoting and marketing the telecourse program and especially their particular distance learning class. This may make the difference between whether a class makes or not.

Support Staff Responsibilities

Your distance learning faculty handbook should clearly explain the role of the distance learning staff in supporting both faculty and students. If staff determine which courses will be offered, develop a broadcast/cablecast schedule, and assign faculty, state this in your handbook. The advertising and marketing of distance learning courses, distribution of student syllabi and course materials, and program evaluation are other important support staff responsibilities of the support staff to outline in your handbook. Your handbook also sets faculty expectations regarding the word-processing, mailing and duplication services available through the distance learning office

Any other special services provided to faculty and students should be listed in the faculty handbook such as televised course or program updates or telephone hotlines. If the distance learning office acts as a clearinghouse for student questions, explain the type of questions answered by the staff and which questions are referred to faculty. Provide complete information on any staff services, such as selection of testing sites, development of a testing schedule, hiring of test proctors, and distribution of testing materials. List any technical services the staff may provide such as coordinating airing schedules with PBS affiliates or cable companies, delivering videotapes to college learning centers or television stations, or loaning videotapes to distance learning faculty. Support staff may provide faculty with class rosters, student mailing labels, grade sheets, test banks, textbooks or other course materials.

Successful distance learning programs are a collaboration between faculty and staff, and a clear representation of the cooperative roles of faculty and staff in your faculty handbook is very valuable.

General Policies and Procedures

Distance learning faculty will be particularly interested in the issues surrounding faculty assignment, teaching load and compensation - all topics that can and should be addressed in your faculty handbook. Explain who makes faculty assignments, whether distance learning courses are part of regular teaching load or overload, and any differences between distance learning and on-campus faculty compensation formulas. Minimum and maximum class sizes, the circumstances governing class cancellation, and any exceptions to these policies should also be listed in your faculty handbook.

Explain that telecourses are professionally designed and produced instructional packages that usually undergo a rigorous review and approval process before an institution decides to offer one as the basis for a college credit course. Now that many textbook publishers providing videotapes as supplementary materials to standard college texts, it is important that your faculty understand the difference between telecourses and supplementary video, and be aware that some video series may not withstand the academic and technical scrutiny of the review/approval process.

Your faculty handbook is also a good place to list all distance learning delivery methods utilized by your institution. Broadcast and cablecast channels and service areas, videotapes on reserve in the learning center, videocassette loan and/or rental arrangements, interactive teleclasses, internet and electronic bulletin boards are some of the distance learning methods that might be included in your faculty handbook.

Have Good Ideas to Share?

Florida Community College at Jacksonville and Shelby State Community College have developed distance learning faculty handbooks that they are willing to share with colleagues. For sample handbooks or trade good ideas, contact Ellie Minich at FCCJ (eminich@fccjmail.fccj.cc.fl.us) or Jane Sipes at Shelby State (sisipes@sscc.cc.tn.us).